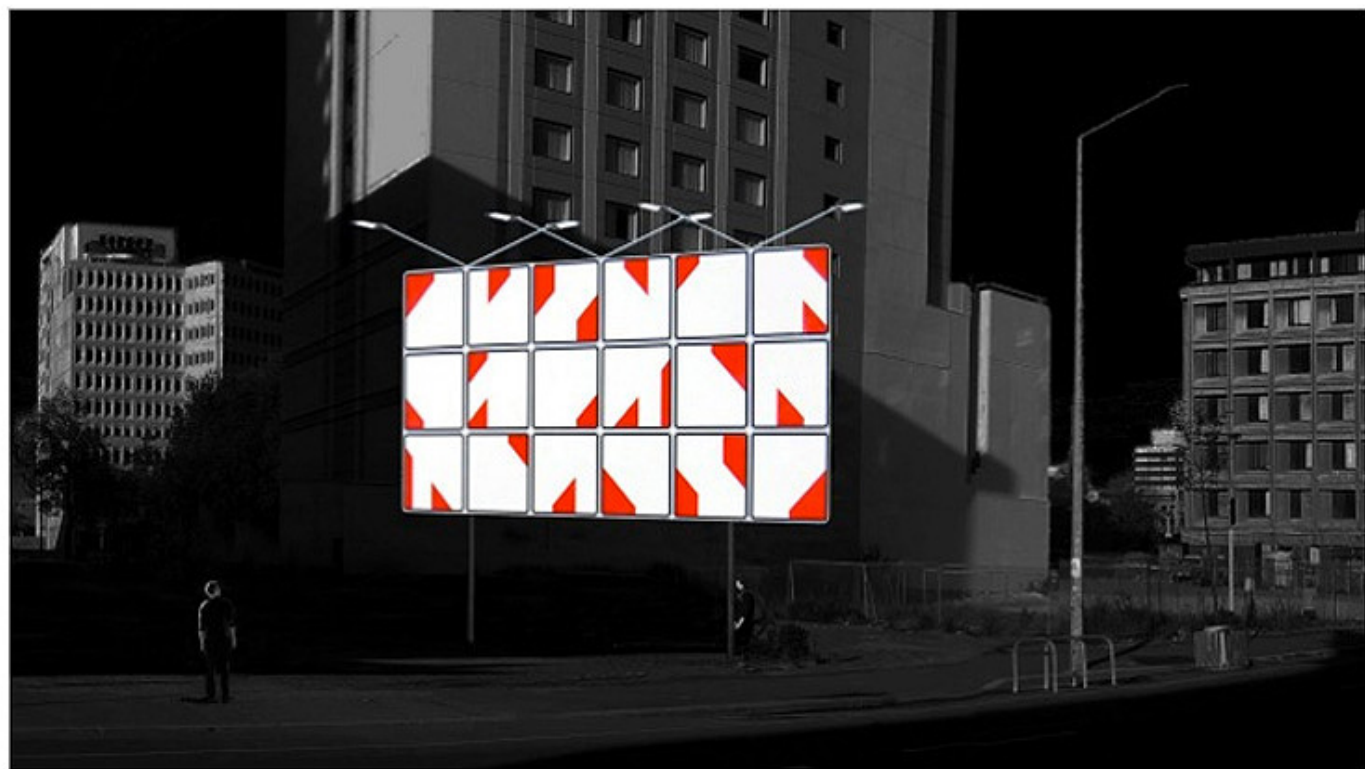


New Christchurch sculpture turns roadwork signs into art

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SUPPLIED

Peter Atkins public artwork, *Under Construction - Chaos and Order*, draws on Christchurch roadwork signs.

A new public artwork uses roadwork signs to capture central Christchurch's shattered present and point to its possibly more ordered future.

A new work by Australian artist Peter Atkins was inspired by Christchurch's chaotic post-quake roads. The artwork, *Under Construction - Chaos and Order*, will be installed on Gloucester St in the city centre for six weeks as part of the Scape Public Art festival starting October 3.

The artist was struck by the shattered state of central Christchurch on a recent visit.

"I was absolutely shocked by the state of the city," he said.

"I was there for over a week ... It was a real eye opener, just trying to navigate through the city centre itself. The city was like Mike Tyson's smile. It was like big gaps of teeth were missing. Something that was probably quite nice had

gone 15 rounds. There were all these sites covered in mountains of rubble. It was a really peculiar landscape. Some buildings had been cleared and some remained."

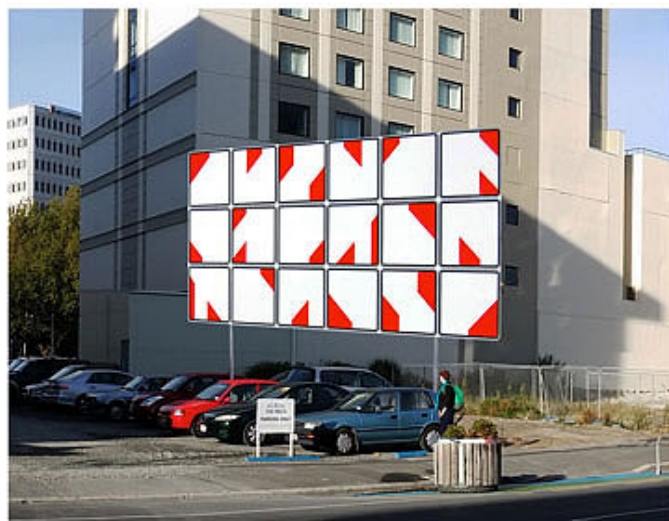
He found his inspiration on the side of the road - a square sign used to redirect traffic around roadworks and construction.

"The very first sign I saw when we got to the inner city was one of those signs. I remember grabbing my camera and getting photographs thinking I would never see it again. But, of course, around the corner there was another one and then another one. I was really fortunate because I knew pretty quickly that this was the form I was going to use. It was ubiquitous throughout the central city.

"It was around buildings that were being demolished and ones that were being rebuilt. These signs were the marker of this intense activity that was happening."

He reduced the signs to a basic abstract image by removing the arrows and placed them in a billboard-sized grid. On one side of the billboard, the signs were in a chaotic broken pattern, while on the other they sat in neat symmetrical pairs.

"My work looks at the city and the fractured, disordered sense that I really wanted to capture. But, at the same time, I didn't want it to be this hopeless narrative that there will be nothing in the future and it won't get better. I know that things will get better," he said.



Here is how the artwork will look during the day on Gloucester St in Christchurch city centre opposite the Isaac Theatre Royal.

"I wanted a sense of optimism to it. The sense that, in the future, all the parts would be put back together like a jigsaw.

"I could have just had one side that talked about the city as it is in an abstract way, but there is a second side that offers this optimistic view of the future. It is not all doom and gloom."

Atkins believed the chaotic side of the artwork captured Christchurch's city centre.

"When I put all the disordered sections together it read as roadways, pathways and roofs and chimneys. It became the fractured city."

The abstract roadwork signs also reminded Atkins of a series of works by New Zealand artist Colin McCahon. The Angels and Bed

paintings, a series of white shapes on a black background, were inspired by McCahon's visits to a dying friend. The shapes represented his friend's bed surrounded by stereo speakers as seen from above.

"When I saw that road sign I thought of Colin McCahon's work. Conceptually, there are a lot of links there. It is definitely about loss, confusion and disorder.

"[McCahon's paintings] are dark and black. They are quite stark. I was very moved by those works when I first saw them. They were the first McCahon works I ever saw. They have always stayed with me. They are very potent. They are very simple. Often the best abstract work operates on that level."

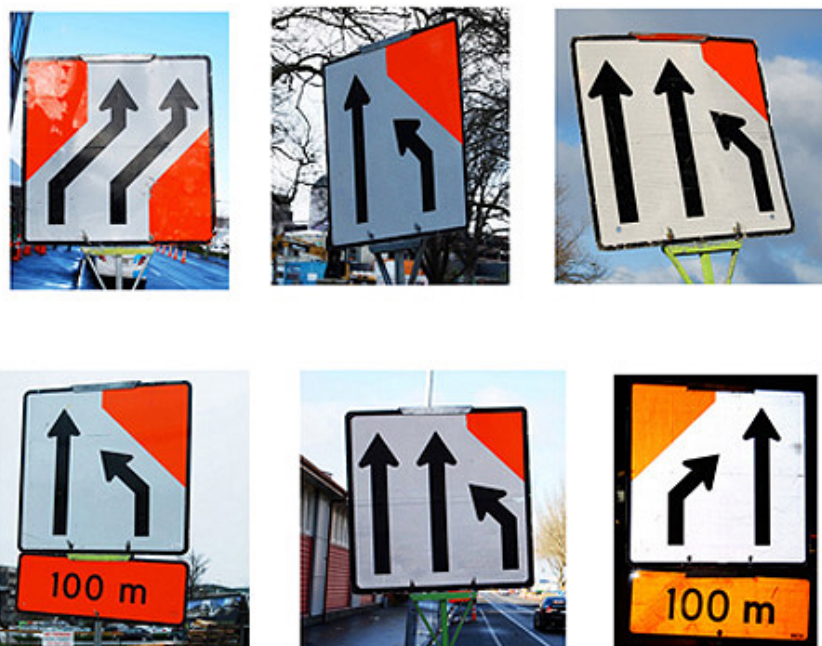
Atkins wanted to capture central Christchurch by using very simple shapes.

"This is pushing abstraction to the limit and eliciting a kind of narrative from those forms. Really, they are just road signs. It is the artist's job to give the viewer a new way of looking at their environment that they would never have considered before. Often it is just the tweaking of the form.

"People will look at it and think of their city. It really is the city."

The visual evolution of an artwork

When Australian artist Peter Atkins visited Christchurch, the roadwork signs caught his attention.



The abstract shapes reminded him of the Angels and Bed series of paintings by New Zealand artist Colin McCahon.



(Credit: Colin McCahon, Angels and bed no. 2 1976, acrylic on paper, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, gift of Mrs L Auburn, 1981. Courtesy of the Colin McCahon Research and Publication Trust.)

So he reduced the roadwork signs to abstract shapes by removing the arrows.



And arranged them in a billboard-sized grid.

On one side, the signs are in a chaotic pattern, representing the shattered city centre. On the other, the signs are arranged in symmetrical pairs, representing Christchurch's possibly more ordered future.



Here is how the artwork will look during the day on Gloucester St in Christchurch city centre opposite the restored Isaac Theatre Royal.